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ABSTRACT

This handbook for Missouri parents of young children with disabilities provides information on obtaining special education services from a local school district. A step-by-step guide for transitioning into preschool is provided. The steps include: (1) referral of the child to their local school; (2) holding a transition conference; (3) arranging with the school to gather and review information about the child; (4) development of an evaluation plan by the school; (5) evaluations completed by the school with a written diagnostic summary; (6) scheduling by the school for holding the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting; and (7) arranging for the special education placement by the school district. The booklet also provides information on the transition conference, hints for a smoother transition, a transition checklist, a description of the IEP process, a comparison of the Missouri First Steps program to early childhood special education, and parental rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A glossary of relevant terms is included, along with a list of helpful state and local resources. (CR)

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First Steps

Transitions to Early Childhood Special Education

A Helpful Guide for Parents

ED 436 891

EC307564

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Dear Fellow Parent,

Welcome to the early childhood special education program!

For me, as a parent, the words "transition to early childhood special education" seemed to invoke a sense of uncertainty or dread. But, having recently completed the transition with our son, Elijah, I can tell you that it was not nearly as ominous as it appeared.

We received great information and support from our transition team, which included my wife and me, a representative from our school district, our First Steps coordinator, and a couple of Elijah's service providers.

Having the information contained in this handbook was a tremendous asset to my wife and me as we embarked on this phase of our child's education planning. I strongly recommend that you carefully read through this booklet, then use it as a guide and reference as you enter into the exciting world of early childhood special education.

Best wishes,

Todd Mayfield
Jefferson City, Missouri

Community Resources

(Use this page to list programs and services in your community.)

Local School District

School District _____ Telephone No. _____

Address _____

Director of Special Education or other School Contact _____

Local Private Preschool and Intervention Programs:

Agency Name & Address Telephone Number Contact Person

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The Steps For Obtaining Special Education Services From Your Local School District

We hope that your child with special developmental needs has been able to participate in Missouri's *First Steps* program. Children approaching their third birthday who are eligible for special education and related services will transition to the local school district for those services upon their third birthday (unless that birthday occurs during regular school vacation times, in which case transitioning occurs when school resumes). The following information will serve as a step-by-step guide to obtaining services for your child, if eligible.

Step 1

Refer Your Child to the Local School

- Your child should be referred to the local school district to determine his/her eligibility for services about six months before his/her third birthday.
- Almost anyone can contact the school. This would include you, your First Steps Service Coordinator, PAT Parent Educator, or other interested person.
- A representative of the school is required to participate in the transition process.
- Shortly after the referral, the school will give you your Procedural Safeguards.

Step 2

Hold a Transition Conference

- The Transition Conference should occur about six months before your child's third birthday. (See *The Transition Conference* on page 5 for more information.)
- At this conference a Transition Plan should be developed and documented in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- The Plan should include the events and activities that need to take place so your child can start school if he/she qualifies for special education on his/her third birthday.

Step 3

The School Will Gather and Review Information About Your Child (Screening, Review, and Referral For Evaluation)

- The school will need to review information about your child and identify reasons to consider special education as a service your child may need. They will talk with you and need your permission to review any of your child's First Steps records.
- The purpose of this process is to decide if and/or what type of additional screening and evaluations the school needs to complete for your child.

Step 4

The School Will Develop an Evaluation Plan

- The school district will develop an Evaluation Plan to determine your child's eligibility and present level of performance.
- The school district is required to notify you **in writing** of its intent to evaluate/observe your child and to answer any questions you might have about the evaluation and/or your Procedural Safeguards.
- You must sign a *Consent to Evaluate* before the school can evaluate/observe your child for the first time.

Step 5

Any Needed Evaluations Will Be Completed and a Diagnostic Summary Written

- Any needed evaluations for your child will be completed by a Multidisciplinary Team unless the only area of concern is speech, which includes articulation, voice, and/or fluency. (A Speech Pathologist will conduct the evaluation if the only area of concern is speech.)
- Information you provide about your child's development is part of the evaluation.
- After the needed evaluations have been completed, a Diagnostic Summary will be written. The summary will describe your child's present level of performance and provide an educational diagnosis. You should receive a copy of the Diagnostic Summary.

Step 6

The School Will Set Up a Time With You to Hold Your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting

- After the evaluation, **if your child qualifies for special education services,** the school will schedule an IEP Meeting to develop your child's IEP. You will receive Procedural Safeguards when you are notified of the meeting.
- **You** are an equal member of the IEP Team.
- The IEP Team will discuss and develop goals and objectives or benchmarks.
- The IEP Team will decide what special education and related services are needed for your child.
- The IEP Team also will determine the best placement for your child.
- See *The IEP Process* on page 8 for more information on IEP development.
- If your child **does not** qualify for Early Childhood Special Education, you and your Service Coordinator will explore other service options within your community and local school district.

Step 7

Your Local School District Will Arrange For the Special Education Placement

- The school will provide you a **written notice** describing your child's special education placement.
- You will then be asked to sign a *Consent for Placement* **before** your child receives special education and related services from the school district.

The Transition Conference

The Transition Conference should be called about six months before your child turns three years of age (the 30-month IFSP conference). Your First Steps Service Coordinator should contact you to set up a meeting date and time. This conference also can occur during a regularly scheduled six-month IFSP review.

Purpose of the Transition Conference

The purpose of the Transition Conference is to develop a Transition Plan. This plan will outline the steps needed for your child to transition from First Steps at age three. In addition, this conference can be the time to meet the special education representative from your local school district. You can share information about your child, discuss eligibility requirements, and receive information about the special education services provided or coordinated by your local school.

Who Will Attend the Transition Conference

- You, as parent or guardian, should attend the Transition Conference.
- Your First Steps Service Coordinator coordinates this conference.
- The school district will be contacted and a representative invited, such as your Parent Educator or someone from the special education staff.
- Any other persons or service providers who might help develop a Transition Plan can be invited.

The Transition Plan

The Transition Plan can be loosely structured or very formal, but it must be documented in the IFSP. Your plan should include the steps necessary for obtaining preschool services through your local school district if your child is eligible, or alternate plans if your child is not eligible. The following should be included:

- What type of training and information you may need regarding your child's transition or future placements.
- What type of support your child may need to help him/her adjust and function in the new setting.
- The information/records available for your child (evaluations, medical records, educational records, etc.) and where these are located. If you agree, you will need to sign release of information forms so these records can be sent to your local school district.
- Any alternate plans, including transition to another type of educational setting such as Head Start or a Chapter I Preschool Program, child care settings, or suggestions if you and your family are moving to a new area.

Remember, the Transition Plan is a guide and its purpose is to help make the transition from First Steps smoother for you and your child.

Helpful Hints for a Smoother Transition

Start Early—the transition process should start about six months before your child's third birthday. This early start gives you and your child time to prepare for the transition. The early start also gives the school time to obtain records, complete needed evaluations, determine eligibility, and if eligible, develop the IEP.

Be part of the planning process—the more involved you are, the smoother the transition.

Know and understand your child's educational rights and your rights as the parent or guardian—your local school district is required to provide you a copy of the Procedural Safeguards at the following times:

- Initial referral for evaluation
- Notification of IEP
- Reevaluation
- Registration of a due process complaint

Know and understand the rights and responsibilities of the school district.

Know what your child can do—your child's strengths. Also be willing to share your child's likes, dislikes, and favorite activities with the school district representative.

Think about annual goals and short term objectives or benchmarks for your child—goals need to be *specific*, *realistic*, and *achievable*. Remember, goals generally cover one school year and objectives or benchmarks help the child achieve the goals.

Remember, you are transitioning too. You will be saying good-bye to teachers and other individuals who have meant a lot to you. This is difficult to do at any time.

Visit your local school's Early Childhood Special Education program—a visit can help you develop trust and feel comfortable with the people and the program. Remember, please call first. Making an appointment helps everyone arrange their time.

Take the time to develop a relationship with your child's new teacher—learn the names of the people at your local school with whom you will be working. It is usually easier to talk with people you know than people you do not know.

Ask questions about the transition, the services at your local school, and what might appear to be differences in services from First Steps. Understand that both programs—First Steps and early childhood special education—are regulated by law. The law outlines different guidelines for each program.

Transition Checklist

- ☐ 1. The Transition Conference has been held and a Transition Plan has been developed.
- ☐ 2. My child has been referred to my local school district.
- ☐ 3. I have received and understand my Procedural Safeguards.
- 4. The following records and information have been given **or** sent to my local school district:
  - ☐ Birth certificate
  - ☐ Shot (immunization) record
  - ☐ Social Security Number
  - ☐ Medicaid number (if applicable)
  - ☐ Emergency contacts (family members, doctor, special instructions in case of an emergency, etc.)
  - ☐ Missouri First Steps records
  - ☐ Other Preschool program records
  - ☐ Regional Center records (if applicable)
  - ☐ Bureau of Special Health Care Needs records (if applicable)
  - ☐ Hospital, clinic, or medical records (if applicable)
  - ☐ Prescription for physical therapy (if applicable)
- ☐ 5. All needed screenings and evaluations have been completed for my child.
- ☐ 6. Eligibility for special education services has been determined for my child.
- ☐ 7. If my child **is not** eligible for special education services from my local school district, other options have been discussed with my service coordinator.
- ☐ 8. I have visited my local school district's Early Childhood Special Education Program (if available in my district) **or** visited other area programs.
- ☐ 9. My child's IEP Conference has been held and goals for the coming year have been set.
- ☐ 10. Placement for my child has been determined.
- ☐ 11. If needed, transportation has been arranged.
- ☐ 12. I have met and talked with my child's new teacher(s).

The IEP Process

A short time before your child turns three years old (unless your child turns three in the summer) the school district will hold a meeting to develop your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is the plan the school district will use to provide special education and related services for your child during the school year.

Purpose of the IEP Meeting

The purpose of the IEP meeting is to write an Individualized Education Program for your child. The IEP must contain the following:

- Your child's strengths and your concerns for your child's educational needs;
- your child's present level of performance—what your child is able to do and not able to do;
- annual goals and short-term instructional objectives or benchmarks to meet the goals;
- types and amounts of special education services and related services for your child—usually stated as number of minutes per week;
- program changes/modifications your child will need and the location, frequency, and length of time the services will be offered;
- the method or procedures that will be used to measure (determine) if the objectives have been met;
- a statement explaining which activities in the IEP are not typical for preschool age children;
- information about challenging behaviors, communication needs, and vision or hearing problems if they apply to your child; and
- documentation of the IEP team members.

Who Will Attend the IEP Meeting

You, as parent or guardian, should attend the IEP meeting. The school also will have people attending this meeting. The persons from the school typically include:

- A teacher certificated in early childhood special education;
- a teacher who works with regular preschool or Kindergarten classes;
- a supervisor of special education (a principal or special education director); and
- any therapist who might work with your child.

Also, any person whom you or the school believes necessary can be invited to attend the IEP meeting. This might include your First Steps Service Coordinator, a teacher or therapist from the program your child has been attending, or a PAT representative.

Before the Meeting

Many parents find it helpful to keep a notebook of important records. Such notebooks might include a shot (immunization) record, a birth certificate, important numbers and cards such as Medicaid and/or Social Security, copies of any

evaluations the child has received, any medical records that are important for the child, and pictures of the child. Whatever you decide to keep in this notebook will help your child, you, and the school personnel at the IEP meeting.

In addition to keeping a notebook for your child's records, you might consider doing the following before the IEP meeting:

- Review the educational rights of your child and your rights as a parent or guardian (Procedural Safeguards).
- Write down what you see as your child's strengths and areas of difficulty.
- Make a short list of things you would like your child to accomplish.

The IEP Meeting

As the parent or guardian, **you** are a member of the IEP team. You have valuable information and advice to give. During the IEP meeting, feel free to:

- Speak up on what you believe should be in your child's IEP; and
- ask questions about any part of the meeting **or** IEP that is not clear to you.

We also suggest that you:

- Understand the placement for your child and the special education and related services that will be provided; and
- request a copy of your child's IEP (this will help you keep up with your child's progress as well as work with your child at home).

After the IEP Meeting

It is important to continue the communication between you and the school after the IEP meeting.

- Ask what types of parent involvement activities are available at your local school and plan to be involved as much as you can.
- Talk with your child's teacher on a regular basis.
- Do not hesitate to contact the school with any questions you might have.

If you and the school cannot agree on what is needed for your child, then you can ask for a resolution conference or proceed to a due process hearing. If you have **not** requested a resolution conference, but asked to proceed with due process, mediation will be offered prior to moving forward with a hearing. These two procedures have been developed to protect the educational rights of your child. These procedures can help both you and the school work out a difference in opinion and come up with a solution. (Be sure to read your copy of the Procedural Safeguards and ask any questions you might have.)

Remember, a due process hearing is intended to be used as a last resort. You and the school district should not ask for a hearing if normal discussions can produce a solution.

Comparing First Steps to Early Childhood Special Education

There are some similarities and some differences between **First Steps** and **Early Childhood Special Education**. The following is a brief comparison of the two programs. If you have further questions, please discuss them with your Service Coordinator, and/or the local school district representative.

Missouri First Steps

Age Served:
Children, birth to age three, provided they meet eligibility standards.

Focus:
First Steps will focus on helping to meet the needs of both the eligible child and the family.

Type of Plan Used:
First Steps uses the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). The needs of the child and family are stated as outcomes in the IFSP.

Service Delivery Model:

- First Steps is a voluntary participation program.
- Coordination of services is provided through the departments of Health or Mental Health. Planning is accomplished at the IFSP conference.
- In the IFSP conference, the parent, the service coordinator, and other team members plan **what** services are needed, **who** will provide the services, and **where** the services will be given. Services are based upon the unique developmental needs identified in the child's evaluation and the outcomes chosen by the family.
- A variety of local programs and professionals can be used to provide needed services.
- Services provided through local private agencies might include home visits, parent-child education programs, and/or specialized therapy sessions, if needed.
- Services in First Steps are generally provided in the natural environment. Natural environments are settings in which infants and toddlers without disabilities would participate, such as the home, child care setting, etc.
- In First Steps, the main contact for continued services or a change in services is the Service Coordinator.
- Children will transition out of First Steps at age three. Eligible children will transition into services coordinated by the local school district. Other service options (Head Start, regular preschool, etc.) will be discussed with the parent if the child is not eligible for special education.

Early Childhood Special Education

Age Served:
Children, ages three to five, are provided services if they meet eligibility standards.

Focus:
Early Childhood Special Education will focus on the child and his/her educational needs.

Type of Plan Used:
Your local school district is required by law to use an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This program will include annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks for the child.

Service Delivery Model:

- Early Childhood Special Education is a voluntary participation program.
- The needed special education and related services for the child are coordinated through the local school district. Planning is accomplished at the IEP meeting.
- During the IEP meeting, educational goals and objectives are developed based upon the child's present level of performance, which is based upon the child's evaluation. After the goals and objectives are developed, the team determines how they can be met and what services are necessary to accomplish them. The team also identifies the frequency and duration of services. (The parent is considered a full team member at the IEP meeting.)
- The local school district will have a variety of special education service options available for the child. These options might include classroom and traveling (itinerant) models.
- Schools must place children in the Least Restrictive Environment. This means the child will generally be served in a setting with children without disabilities.
- If the local school district does not have services or the available services do not fit the child's needs, other options will then be considered. These options might include placement in a neighboring school district or placement in an approved local, privately run program.
- Typically, the main contact for continued special education services or a change in services will be the child's teacher.
- Continued special education services are available for children after their preschool years if they meet the state's eligibility requirements and have a continued need for special education.

Your Rights as a Parent or Guardian (Procedural Safeguards)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides you, as parent or guardian, with certain rights in regard to obtaining and continuing services for your child with a disability. Many of these rights are similar to those you have with First Steps (IDEA-Part C).*

In brief, your rights under IDEA-Part B are:

Written Notice

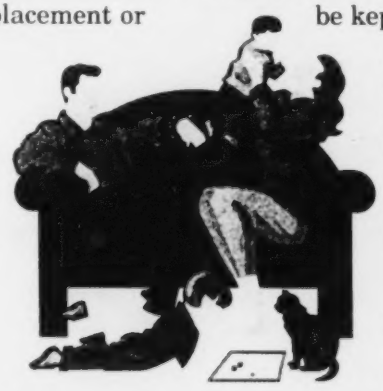
You must be notified in writing before the school evaluates, places your child in special education, changes placement or diagnosis, or refuses your request for evaluation, placement, or services.

Written Consent

You must give your written consent before your child is evaluated **and** before he/she is placed in special education.

Educational Evaluation

If you believe that your child has special needs or a disability, you have the right to have your child screened and, if needed, evaluated at no cost to you.



Confidentiality of Information

The information stored and used by the school district regarding your child must be kept confidential. This information is stored and released in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

Due Process

If you and the school district cannot agree on the evaluation, the identification, the placement, or the provision of a free and appropriate public education for your child, both you and the school have the right to request a hearing to settle this difference of opinion.

*Please contact your local school district's Special Education Director or representative for a full explanation of your child's educational rights and the procedural safeguards guaranteed to you as parent or guardian.

Helpful Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABA	Applied Behavioral Analysis
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ARC	Association for Retarded Citizens, Inc.
BE/ED*	Behavior Disorders/ Emotionally Disturbed
BSHCN	Bureau of Special Health Care Needs
CF	Cystic Fibrosis
CP	Cerebral Palsy
DESE	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
D/B*	Deaf/Blind
DD	Developmental Disability; Developmental Delay
DMH	Department of Mental Health
DOH	Department of Health
ECSE	Early Childhood Special Education
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
HB #	House Bill number
HI*	Hearing Impaired
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
IHP	Individual Habilitation Plan
LD*	Learning Disabilities
LEA	Local Education Agency
LICC	Local Interagency Coordinating Council
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse
MA	Mental Age
MMR	Mild or Moderate Mental Retardation
MR*	Mental Retardation
OT	Occupational Therapy or Occupational Therapist
OTR	Occupational Therapist, Registered
PAT	Parents-As-Teachers
POHI*	Physically/Other Health Impaired
PL	Public Law
PT	Physical Therapy or Physical Therapist
RN	Registered Nurse
SB #	Senate Bill number
SDD	Severely Developmentally Disabled
SICC	State Interagency Coordinating Council
SPED	Special Education
SP&L*	Speech and Language Disorders
ST	Speech Therapy
TBI*	Traumatic Brain Injury
VI*	Visually Impaired

The asterisk (*) denotes areas of categorical diagnoses in Missouri. The two categories not listed are Autism and Multiple Disabilities.

Glossary of Helpful Terms

Assessment—individual evaluation of a student's performance and/or development. This information about the child can be used in educational planning. The planning process may or may not result in special education instruction and services.

Categorical disability—any of the disabling conditions listed in Part B of IDEA.

Cognitive—the brain process used for thinking, reasoning, understanding, and judging.

Developmental—the steps or stages of mental, physical, and social growth in children under age 18.

Due process—the legal procedures or steps available to protect the educational rights of the student.

Evaluation—the process used to find out if a child qualifies for special education services. This process can include parent reports, teacher reports, observations of the child, reviewing records, and formal and informal testing.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—the federal law that provides the guidelines for special educational services for children birth to age 21. Part B outlines services for children ages three to 21 and Part C outlines services to children birth to age three.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)—a written educational plan designed to meet the individual special education and related service needs of a child.

Intervention—all of the efforts made on behalf of the child with a disability (or at risk for developing a disability) to help that child live as normal a life as possible.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)—the most normal educational setting possible while still being able to meet the special education needs of the child.

Related services—supportive services required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. Related services for a child are discussed and decided upon during the IEP conference. These services may be provided by either consultation or direct service. Some examples of related services under Part B of IDEA include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy, recreation, counseling services, psychological services, school health services, social work services, assistive technology services, assistive technology devices, rehabilitation counseling services, parent counseling and training, audiology, and special transportation.

Screening—this is the process of *quickly* looking at a child's development to find out if that child is having any problems. Screening is used to recommend children for more in-depth evaluation and assessment.

Service delivery—the manner or setting in which special education and related services will be provided to the child and/or family.

Therapy—a specialized treatment for certain physical conditions. The most common therapies in the public schools are occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language therapy. Therapies listed in the IEP are related services and must be required to help your child benefit from his/her special education.

- **Occupational therapy**—a therapy or treatment provided by **or** under the direction of a certified occupational therapist. This therapy focuses on using the hands and fingers, coordinated movement, and self-help skills (eating, dressing, toileting, etc.).
- **Physical therapy**—treatment provided by or under the direction of a licensed physical therapist. Physical therapy helps the child improve use of the muscles, joints, bones, and nerves. Physical therapy must be prescribed by a physician.
- **Speech and language therapy**—the treatment provided by **or** under the direction of a certificated speech pathologist. This treatment focuses on helping the child communicate better by improving the way a child makes word sounds (clearer speech), the quality of voice (correcting for pitch, nasality, etc.), and being able to express and/or understand verbal communication (talking back and forth). In some cases, speech therapy may be the only special education service, and therefore would not be considered a related service.

Transition—the movement from one place or program to another. In special education, transition means moving from one program to another or moving out of the school setting for older children. Young children with disabilities will transition at age three from First Steps into Early Childhood Special Education **or** other appropriate settings.

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Helpful Resources In Missouri

Center for Innovations in Special Education (CISE)

1-800-976-2473 (MO only)
http://tiger.coe.missouri.edu/~mocise
University of Missouri-Columbia
601 Business Loop 70 West
Parkade Center, Suite 152
Columbia, MO 65211

CISE provides information, resources, and training related to the education of students with disabilities. Materials relating to early childhood special education and best practices are available for checkout by parents and educators. For more information, please contact CISE.

Developmental Disabilities Resource Center at UMKC (DDRC)

1-800-444-0821
www.ihd.umkc.edu/mddrc.htm

The DDRC provides information on specific disabilities.

Head Start

Contact your local Community Action Program or your local school district for information, **or** contact the Regional Head Start office for Missouri at the:

Department of Health and Human Services
Room 276 Federal Building
601 East 12th Street
Kansas City, MO 64106
(816) 426-5401, ext. 181

Head Start provides education, parent involvement, social services, and medical and nutritional services for low-income families and their children.

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

(573) 751-0187
http://dese.state.mo.us
Early Childhood Special Education Section
PO Box 480
Jefferson City, MO 65102

DESE is the lead agency for administering and supervising the First Steps program and the public schools' early childhood special education programs.

Missouri Department of Health (DOH)

(573) 751-6246
PO Box 570
Jefferson City, MO 65102

The DOH provides service coordination for First Steps in addition to administering a variety of health care and health service programs to qualified citizens of Missouri.

Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH)

(573) 751-4054
PO Box 687
Jefferson City, MO 65102

The DMH provides a variety of services and programs throughout Missouri for persons with disabilities and their families as well as many other community services. For more information, contact your local Department of Mental Health office or Regional Center.

Missouri Parents Act (MPACT)

Springfield Office 1-800-743-7634
St. Louis Office 1-800-995-3160
Kansas City Office 1-800-333-6833
www.crn.org/mpact/

MPACT provides information and workshops to parents on the IEP process, educational rights, and communication strategies. The MPACT staff also will provide individual assistance to parents with specific questions concerning a child who has a disability.

ParentLink

1-800-552-8522
http://outreach.missouri.edu/parentlink

ParentLink is an information and referral source for parents and professionals in Missouri who have questions about parenting. There is no charge for any direct ParentLink service.

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Contact your local school district.

Parents-As-Teachers (PAT) is a no-cost program for Missouri parents who have children birth to three years of age. This program is operated by your local school. PAT will provide you with parenting information, in-home or private visits, and screening services.

Tel-Link

1-800-835-5465

Tel-Link is an information and referral resource for mothers and pregnant women. This information service tries to help individuals obtain health care and prenatal care services. Tel-Link also may be used by professionals. There is no cost for any direct Tel-Link service.

Resources at the National Level

There are many organizations and associations across America. We cannot list them all here. If you are interested in other organizations, please contact:

- **CISE**
  1-800-976-2473
- **Developmental Disabilities Resource Center at UMKC**
  1-800-444-0821
- **Your nearest MPACT office**
  (see numbers above).

Credits:

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